

School of Theology at Claremont



1001 1323336

BV
255
F



The Library

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

3V
985
16
THE IMPORTANCE

OF

PRAYER MEETINGS,

IN PROMOTING

THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

BY ROBERT YOUNG.

"Pray one for another," James v, 16.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY G. LANE & P. P. SANDFORD,

For the Methodist Episcopal Church, at the Conference Office,
200 Mulberry-street.

J. Collord, Printer.

1841.

Theology Library

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

ADVERTISEMENT.

As many pious persons are prejudiced against what are generally termed revival prayer meetings, and as others say they know not how to conduct them with advantage, the author of the following pages has humbly attempted to remove the prejudices of the former, and to offer suggestions for the direction of the latter. For several years he has been in the habit of holding such meetings, and is fully persuaded of their great utility when properly conducted. He has chosen to express his sentiments in a series of conversations, rather than in an essay, believing that this

A 8403
**School of Theology
at Claremont**

mode of communicating information on such a subject is much more likely to interest than the other. "If he have done well, and as fitting the story, it was that which he desired : but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which he could attain unto."

London, Nov. 14th, 1840.

CONTENTS.

CONVERSATION I.

Sabbath evening prayer meeting—Many converted—Knowledge of forgiveness—*Direct* witness of the Spirit—Not equally clear in every case—Precedes the *inferential* witness—Not peculiar to the Wesleyans—Testimonies of Bishop Hooper, Calvin, Witsius, Bishop Andrews, Hooker, Bishop Brownrigg, Bishop Pearson, Archbishop Usher, Dr. Brown, Dr. Owen, Case, Carlyll, S. Clarke, M. Pool, O. Heywood, Howe, and Dr. Watts—Enjoyed by persons of distinction—Examples, Sir Richard Hill and Cowper Page ■

CONVERSATION II.

Sudden conversions—Long period of deliberation and penitence unnecessary—Backslidings no proof that sudden conversions are not genuine—Remarkable conversion—Such conversions common in the apostolic age—

Not effected by miracle—In accordance with the spirit of the Bible—Many such conversions on record in the annals of the church—Numerous examples Page 23

CONVERSATION III.

Preaching the instrument of conversion—Sinners awakened under the word—Saved in the prayer meeting—Why—Influence of intercessory prayer—How far the salvation of souls may be influenced by it—Why it is not more successful—Remarkable answers to prayer in Scotland, the Friendly Isles, and America—Prayers of ■ mother heard for her son—Influences which prompt effectual prayer derived from God himself 33

CONVERSATION IV.

Penitents invited to present themselves at the altar—A measure implying decision and public confession—Opposed to the tendencies of corrupt nature—According to the spirit of Christianity—Countenanced by Scriptural precedent—Not more mechanical than other forms of worshipping God—Religious worship to be regulated by certain great Scriptural principles—Conformity of this measure with those principles—It may be abused—How that may be prevented 46

CONVERSATION V.

Excitement—Its importance in religion—Human sympathy employed by the Spirit to awaken men—A striking example of this—Excitement in religion becoming—Much of it in the days of the apostles—Examples of it in different churches—No religion without some excitement—Its degree regulated by different causes—Different effects produced on two sisters on hearing of their brother's melancholy death—Excitement of the soldier when pardoned, while kneeling on his coffin to be shot—Other examples Page 56

CONVERSATION VI.

Praising God for sinners saved—Mr. Wesley's practice—Other Christian denominations—Noise—Sanctified noise—Much of it under the former dispensation—in heaven—Children converted—Their conversion to be expected—New converts sent into the vestry—Why—Books presented to them—Character of those persons who engage in such meetings—Censoriousness—Not all on one side—Late meetings to be avoided—Blessed results of revivals 72

CONVERSATION VII.

Some ministers do not patronize revival prayer meetings—Why—Pious men sometimes prejudiced—Improper conduct of reputed converts—Persons walking about the chapel and speaking to others—Prayer leaders using too much familiarity—Speaking to penitents—Irreverent conduct of some professors—Great variety in the mental constitution—Want of adaptation—The conversion of a lady and two opposers—Success of revival prayer meetings—Continuous revivals—Divine sovereignty—All the means of grace, as well as prayer meetings, may be efficient in the revival of religion—Prayer meetings but auxiliary to the preaching of the gospel 87

THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
PRAYER MEETINGS.

CONVERSATION I.

Hearer. I AM one of your occasional hearers, and was present last sabbath evening at the prayer meeting held immediately after the public service ; and as there were several things connected with that meeting which I did not understand, I have taken the liberty of waiting upon you this morning to make a few inquiries on the subject.

Minister. I shall be happy to answer any inquiry you propose, as far as the Lord may give me ability, provided your object be to gain information. But if it be to cavil, or to treat the subject with ridicule and levity, I shall decline doing so ; for its sacred character requires that it be approached with solemn and devotional feeling.

H. I hope, sir, you do not think me so vile a person as to be capable of treating a subject so important in the way you mention. It is, indeed, true that, as respects religion, I am exceedingly deficient; but I assure you that, with all my faults, I am neither an infidel nor a blasphemer.

M. I do not think you are; but I lament to say, that some professors of religion treat with ridicule what are called revival prayer meetings, and by facetious remarks, and ludicrous anecdotes, excite unholy merriment in the family or social circle, at the expense of those who take a part in them.

H. Such conduct, in my opinion, is highly improper.

M. Undoubtedly it is; for such meetings are either right or wrong:—if they be wrong, they should not be tolerated, but put down by Scriptural arguments; and if right, they ought to be encouraged and supported by the professed disciples of Christ. But now for your inquiries.

H. My inquiries will principally refer to the professed conversions which took place. I think upward of thirty persons professed to be converted in that meeting; or, in other words, to obtain the forgiveness of their sins.

M. And what was there in that which you did not comprehend?

H. Why, in the first place, I did not see how those persons could be assured of their having received that inestimable blessing.

M. You, of course, believe that the Lord has promised forgiveness to "all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe ;" and that it is impossible to become the children of God, and heirs of heaven, without that blessing.

H. Certainly I do. My objection does not lie against its attainment, as I am fully persuaded sin must be pardoned or punished ; but against that knowledge of it which those persons last sabbath evening professed to receive.

M. But if a man be not assured of his acceptance with God, how is it possible for him to be happy ? Religion is certainly intended to make him happy ; but if it bring not with it the evidence of the divine approbation, but leave him in doubt and perplexity as to his state, it must fail to do so. He cannot claim its promises, and enjoy its present consolations, any more than he can anticipate its future rewards, without knowing that he is in possession of it. Besides, the Scriptures on this point are full and unequivocal :—Abel "obtained witness that he was righteous ; God

testifying of his gifts ;” and Enoch “ had this testimony, that he pleased God.” David said, “ I confessed my transgression, and thou, Lord, forgavest the iniquity of my sin ;” and Isaiah exclaimed, “ In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee : though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.” If New Testament witnesses be wanted on the subject, we have them at hand ; for St. Paul says, “ We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God ; a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens :” and St. John declares, “ We know that we are of God ;” and, “ He that believeth hath the witness in himself.” I might easily multiply passages ; but as these are sufficiently explicit, and fully substantiate the delightful truth to which those persons last sabbath evening bore testimony, I deem it unnecessary to add more.

H. I do not deny the possibility of a man knowing that he is a child of God, and, of course, that his sins are forgiven ; but such knowledge, I conceive, must be derived from a source of evidence which the persons in question could not have. The Scriptures describe, in a variety of particulars, the character of the

children of God ; and if, on close examination, a man is fully convinced that his feelings and conduct accord with that description, he may then humbly infer that he is of the happy number.

M. The evidence you mention is certainly legitimate and important ; but there is another kind of evidence mentioned in the Scriptures which you appear to overlook. St. Paul, in writing to the Romans, says, “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Here you perceive two witnesses mentioned ; the witness of God’s Spirit, and the witness of our own spirit. The one is direct, and the other inferential : the former is an “inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit that they are children of God.” The latter is the result of reason, or reflection on what they feel in their souls and perceive in their lives ; and is, in fact, the evidence to which you have already alluded.

H. Does the witness of God’s Spirit, as you have explained it, precede the other evidence of salvation, and which you call the witness of our own spirit ?

M. It does : for in the very nature of things the testimony of God's Spirit must be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirit. This, I think, is evident from the following considerations :—“We must be holy in heart, and holy in life, before we can be conscious that we are so ; before we can have the testimony of our own spirit that we are inwardly and outwardly holy. But we must love God before we can be holy at all ; this being the root of all holiness. Now, we cannot love God till we know he loves us : ‘We love him, because he first loved us.’ And we cannot know his pardoning love to us till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit. Since, therefore, this testimony of his Spirit must precede our love of God and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our inward consciousness thereof, or the testimony of our own spirit concerning them.”

H. And does every man enjoy the same direct testimony of acceptance with God on his believing in Christ ?

M. In every case it may not be equally clear. The Scriptures speak of degrees of faith ; of “weak faith,” and of “strong faith ;” and I conceive the witness of the Spirit will be more or less clear, according to the strength of the faith exercised. And not only so, but

some persons under conviction of sin are in greater anguish than others; and when "the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto them," the change is of course more sensibly felt; the internal impression is deeper, and the witness in general much more clear, than in the case of those who have not been so powerfully wrought upon. The clearness of this witness may also be affected in some measure by the character of a man's mind, as well as by the degree of Scriptural knowledge he may possess at the period of his conversion. The most of those who professed to find peace with God last sabbath evening, appeared to receive a very clear witness; and some of them on obtaining it were completely overpowered. The young man who, on finding mercy, immediately inquired for the man who was his enemy, reminded me of a most interesting scene which I had the pleasure of witnessing some years ago. Two men who were proverbial for their hating one another, met one evening at the house of God; and being both awakened under the sermon, they, unknown to each other, remained in the prayer meeting which was held after the regular service. They were in deep anguish of mind; but after wrestling in prayer for ■■■■■

time, both obtained peace through believing ; and no sooner did they recognise each other in the chapel, than, yielding to the impulse of their new nature, they rushed through the crowd between them, fell upon each other's neck, and loudly wept before the whole congregation.

H. But is not the doctrine of the *direct* witness of the Spirit peculiar to the Wesleyan denomination of Christians ?

M. Certainly not. Bishop Hooper says, "Blessed is that man in whose heart God's Spirit beareth record that he is the son of God." Calvin says, that "our mind of itself, independently of the preceding testimony of the Spirit, could not produce this persuasion, that we are the sons of God." Witsius says, "There is a certain instinct immediately assuring God's beloved people of their adoption." Bishop Andrews says, that "the Spirit puts his teste," (witness;) "and if we have his teste, we may go our way in peace." Hooker says, "The Spirit which God giveth us is to assure us that we are the sons of God, and to enable us to call upon him as our Father." Bishop Brownrigg says, "It is one great office of the Holy Spirit to ratify and seal up to ■ the forgiveness of sins." Bishop Pearson says,

"It is the office of the Holy Ghost to assure us of the adoption of sons ; to create in us a sense of the paternal love of God, and to give us an earnest of our everlasting inheritance." Archbishop Usher says, "From adoption flows all Christian joy ; for the Spirit of adoption is, first, a witness ; second, a seal ; third, the pledge and earnest of our inheritance, setting a holy security upon the soul, whereby it rejoiceth, even in affliction, in hope of glory." Dr. Barrow says, "This is the Spirit of adoption, which constitutes us the sons of God, certifying us that we are so, and causing us by a free instinct to cry, Abba, Father." Dr. Owen says, "The Spirit worketh joy in the heart of believers immediately by himself, without the consideration of any other acts or works of his, or the interpositions of any reasonings, or deductions, or conclusions. This does not arise from any reflex consideration of the love of God, but rather gives occasion thereto." Case says, "Another office of the Spirit is that which our divines call immediate ; and it is a bright irradiation of the Holy Ghost beaming out upon the soul ; not only giving it a clear and distinct discerning of its own graces, but immediately witnessing to the soul its adoption by Jesus Christ, and right and title

to the kingdom of God; wherein God speaks to the soul in some such language as this: ‘I am thy salvation: I have blotted out thy transgressions; thy sins are forgiven thee.’” Caryll says, “The Spirit gives a distinct witness of his own, which is his immediate work; and is, in a way of peculiarity and transcendency, called the witness of the Spirit.” Dr. S. Clarke says, “The Spirit of God, without consideration of, or reflecting upon, any of those gracious qualifications he hath wrought in the soul, does by his own immediate power imprint this persuasion upon the heart, ‘Thou art a child of God;’ and by an inward and secret, yet powerful voice, doth say to the soul, ‘Thou art a believer; thy sins are pardoned.’” Matthew Pool says, “The Spirit of adoption doth, by an inward and secret suggestion, raise our hearts to this persuasion, that God is our Father, and we are his children. This is not the testimony of the graces and operations of the Spirit, but of the Spirit itself.” O. Heywood says, “It is likewise the office of the Holy Spirit to dwell in real Christians as the Spirit of adoption, enabling them to address God as their Father, through Jesus Christ, with boldness, liberty, and confidence.” Howe says, “There is an effectual, overpowering commu-

nication of the Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the love of God, that may be had." And Dr. Watts says, "There is an extraordinary witness of the Spirit; and that is, where in an immediate and powerful manner the Holy Spirit impresses the soul with an assurance of divine love, and gives the heart of a saint such a full discovery of his adoption, without the more slow and argumentative method of comparing the dispositions of their souls with some special characters of the children of God in the Scriptures." The sentiments embodied and variously expressed in these extracts, from the works of respectable theologians, of different countries, periods, and religious denominations, are precisely the same as those held by Mr. Wesley; and all delightfully accord with the privilege of the children of God, as described by St. Paul: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

H. Will you explain the manner in which the Spirit thus assures a believer of his acceptance with God?

M. That I pretend not to do. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. "The wind bloweth where it listeth; and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it

cometh, nor whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit." A fact may be certain, while the manner in which it takes place may, from its very nature, be inexplicable. Nor should it be forgotten, that to be able to comprehend and explain a blessing, in all its parts and modes of operation, is not essential to our enjoying it. For instance : we behold the sun, rejoice in the light, breathe in the atmosphere, and feed upon the fruits of the earth, and thus enjoy these various blessings of our Maker, without being able fully to comprehend any one of them. Nor is the sun less warming, the light less cheering, the atmosphere less invigorating, or the fruits of the earth less nutritious, because there is mystery connected with them. You do not deny that the Holy Ghost " convinceth the world of sin," and frequently witnesses to the spirit of a wicked man, that he is guilty before God, and in danger of perishing ; and will you entertain doubts relative to the fact of his bearing witness to the spirit of a believer that his sins are forgiven ? You can no more comprehend and explain the mode of operation in the one case than you can in the other.

H. Have any persons of respectability and

education, not connected with the Wesleyan denomination, professed to be in possession of the direct witness of the Spirit?

M. Yes, many.

H. Then I should like to hear from themselves a description of their feelings on becoming the recipients of so great a blessing.

M. Your desire may very easily be gratified; for if you read Sidney's Life of Sir Richard Hill, you will find the following account of Sir Richard's conversion, written by himself:—
“ On Saturday, February 17th, 1758, to the best of my remembrance, the night before the sacrament, it pleased the Lord, after having given me for a few days before some tastes of his love first, to bring me into a composed state of mind, and then to convey such a thorough sense of his pardoning grace and mercy to my soul, that I, who was just before trembling upon the brink of despair, did now rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The love of God was shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost given unto me, even that perfect love which casteth out fear; and the Spirit itself bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God. O how great a change was this in so short a time! How surpassing all

apprehension was the difference ! I, who but a few nights ago could scarcely suffer my eyes to slumber, or mine eyelids to take any rest, through the despairing agonies with which I was overwhelmed, could not now, during the beginning of the night at least, get to sleep on account of the ecstatic comforts in which my soul was as it were absorbed. Yea, so exceedingly great were those joys, that my body could hardly support them. They in a manner overpowered me, and I was ready to cry out, ‘Lord, hold thy hand, for I can bear no more.’ O how delightful were now the thoughts of death, when my soul should be delivered from the clog of clay, and, instead of partaking of the streams below, should go and drink freely at the fountain of bliss and love!” And if you examine the Life of the celebrated poet Cowper, you will find a beautiful description of his feelings at the time of his receiving the Spirit of adoption. He observes, “ Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport : I could only look to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. But the work of the Holy Spirit is best described in his own words :

it is ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory.’” Many more cases of a similar description might be adduced; but these, I conceive, will be quite satisfactory.

CONVERSATION II.

Hearer. It is but ingenuous to confess that what you have said has much impressed my mind; and I shall certainly attend more seriously to the important subject in future than I have hitherto done. But the knowledge of salvation which the persons last sabbath evening professed to enjoy, was not the only thing that appeared inexplicable; for I was as much puzzled to account for the suddenness of some of the conversions that took place, as I was for the assurance with which they seemed to be attended.

Minister. But if you understand the way of salvation by faith, you will perceive, on duly considering the subject, that in a very short period the soul may pass through that process which the Scriptures declare essential to salvation. The truth is presented to the mind; the Holy Ghost applies it; the sinner feels

deep sorrow of heart; goes as a penitent to the foot of the cross; believes on Him that justifies the ungodly; and at once obtains peace with God. Now all this may certainly take place under ■ sermon, or in a prayer meeting.

H. But are not conversions much more sound when they are gradual rather than instantaneous?

M. Conversion, as comprising the forgiveness of sin, and regeneration of man's nature, is either sound, or it is no conversion at all. The sinner is either forgiven and born again, or he is guilty and unregenerate; there being ■ medium state: and it cannot but be instantaneous whenever it takes place; for as soon as the penitent believes he is forgiven, and that instantaneously; as the word of God, the experience of believers, and the work itself, sufficiently testify.

H. Of course, conversion, considered as an act of pardon, and the regeneration of the heart, must be instantaneous. But what I mean is this,—a person should take time to think seriously about the matter, and deliberately "count the cost."

M. If that be your meaning, I ■■ of the same opinion. The only difference between

us then is the question of time. How long would you have the sinner occupied in counting the cost? A year? He may be dead and in hell long before the termination of that period. Do you then say six months? one month? one week? one day? one hour? But who can assure him that he shall live until the smallest of these portions of time has elapsed? He has no certainty of to-morrow; for he knows not what a day, or even a minute, may bring forth. Nor should it be forgotten, that counting the cost is a state of suspense; and yet, if I may judge from what you say, you apparently consider that the longer a man remains in such a state, the more genuine his conversion is likely to be. Now, the simple state of the case is this:—Life and death are set before the sinner, and he is exhorted to choose life, that he may live. His mind is impressed, and he begins to count the cost; thus reasoning: “If I accept the terms of life proposed in the gospel, I shall be saved; if not, I shall be damned.” Now I ask, what but the world, the flesh, or the devil, is to prevent his doing this at once, and immediately making choice of life by simple faith in Jesus? Surely it does not require years, or months, or days, for a man to make up his mind whether he will be saved or lost!

H. But if conversions which take place without much previous deliberation be genuine, how is it that so many who are the professed subjects of them "fall away?"

M. If you mean that more of them fall away in proportion than of those who have been converted after a long period of deliberation, you assume, perhaps, what you cannot prove. Conversion is always in itself the same thing, whether it be preceded by a year's consideration, or only that of an hour; and the stability of its subjects, in both cases, will very much depend upon the instructions they afterward receive. Perhaps those who have been suddenly brought to God require at first more nursing than others; and your opinion of such converts may be correct in those cases where that nursing is neglected. Or if they fall into the hands of those who are opposed to revivals, and who, instead of gently feeding them with the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby, act the part of inquisitors, with the view of confounding them, or even ridicule and condemn the means by which they have been brought to God, you need not wonder if in these circumstances they should be discouraged, and if in such a time of temptation they should fall away. But many of the persons

you saw on sabbath evening, who professed to find forgiveness, had been concerned about their souls for some time ; and not more than five or six had been awakened under the sermon ; but certainly the conversion of the latter was as clear and as satisfactory as the former. Some time ago, when I was stationed in a northern seaport town, I was waited upon by a gentleman and lady ; when the former, after apologizing for their intrusion, gave the following account of himself :—“ Sir,” said he, “ you may be a little surprised on hearing what I am about to relate. I am a merchant from America, and have accumulated considerable property ; but some months ago my wife left me, in consequence of my gay and dissipated habits. I then determined never to seek after her, but to continue, without restraint, my course of wickedness. I did so ; but being called to Scotland on business, I arrived here on Friday last, on my way to that country, and resolved to remain over the sabbath, that I might see the place. On sabbath evening, as I went down P—— street, I was induced by the sound of a fine organ to enter a chapel, and led to remain during the service by an influence which I could not account for. The preacher had not proceeded far in his discourse before

I imagined that every word was intended for me. At first I felt very uneasy, and at last indescribably miserable. In fact, I was deeply convinced of sin ; and felt that, without a change, I must certainly perish. I remained in the prayer meeting ; knelt with the penitents seeking mercy ; and in about an hour happily found salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The moment I felt that God had pardoned me, the cry of my heart was, ‘O my wife ! O that I could find my wife !’ I went to my lodgings with mingled feelings. I was filled with love and gratitude to God, for what he had done for me ; I was lost in astonishment at the glorious and sudden change which I had experienced ; I was deeply grieved that I had not been a kind and thoughtful husband ; and full of anxiety to find my wife, that I might ask her forgiveness, and if possible lead her to the enjoyment of the same blessing which God had conferred upon me. I accordingly went next morning to the residence of a captain who sails to America, and with whom I am acquainted, thinking it possible that he might be able to give me some tidings of her. After great search I found his house ; and judge of my surprise, sir, when the person who answered the door was my own dear wife ; and

here she is!" The scene which ensued I shall not attempt to describe. Suffice it to say, that some months after the gentleman again called at my house, on the eve of his return to America, and was then living comfortably with his wife, and holding fast his confidence in the Lord.

H. Your narrative is very affecting; but where do you find in the Scriptures any account of such sudden conversions as you contend for?

M. In many places. Read the Acts of the Apostles, and you will find that conversions were ordinarily sudden under their ministry. The three thousand conversions on the day of Pentecost appear all to have taken place during the sittings of one assembly; and all the subsequent outpourings of the Spirit, with which the first age of Christianity was blessed, seem to have been characterized by conversions of this sort. It is true that Saul of Tarsus was three days in seeking the Lord before he obtained comfort; yet the jailer of Philippi and all his house were converted in one hour. And we have reason to believe that such conversions were every day taking place under the ministry of the apostles.

H. But was there not a miraculous agency concerned in producing those conversions?

M. There were miracles wrought in connection with many of them, although not in every case ; but there was no greater miracle in the actual conversion of any of those sinners, than there is in the conversion of any other sinners. Conversion is in all cases the very same work, and accomplished by the agency of the Holy Ghost, however the circumstances of it may differ. So far from miracles being the means of producing *sudden* conversions, they on many occasions failed to produce any salutary impression whatever. If raising the dead could have converted the soul, the Jews, on witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus, would not have taken “counsel together from that day forth to put Jesus to death ;” and if casting out devils could have converted the soul, the Philippians would not have thrust Paul and Silas into the inner prison for having dispossessed a damsel of an evil spirit.

H. I think I have read somewhere that we are not to be guided so much by any insulated passage of Scripture as by the general spirit of the Bible. Now do you think that the spirit of the Bible is favourable to sudden conversion ?

M. I do ; for the Bible calls upon men to repent and turn to the Lord *now*. It does not

instruct them to adopt a course of action preparatory to their doing so at some future period, but allows of no delay. Its language is, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." The ministers of the gospel are to "go into the highways and hedges; and as many as they find they are to bid to the marriage," saying, "Come, for all things are *now* ready." They are directed to offer a present salvation; as must appear to all who have paid any attention to the Scriptures. Now, the Lord surely is sincere. He does not say one thing and mean another. He does not instruct his ambassadors to tell sinners they may now be saved, while he intends they shall not, but must wait weeks, months, or perhaps years, before they shall have salvation.

H. If sudden conversions be according to the Scriptures, why do they not take place more frequently?

M. In addition to the reluctance of human nature to yield immediate submission to the plan of salvation, one reason probably is, that this feature of the gospel is not rendered sufficiently prominent in the ministrations of the sanctuary, and that sinners are not urged at once to give themselves to God. But perhaps they have been, and still are, more frequent in

the church than you imagine. In the sixteenth century, during the period of the Reformation, many sudden conversions took place in Germany, France, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, the Low Countries, and Britain. In the beginning of the seventeenth century many persons were suddenly brought to a knowledge of the truth in different parts of Scotland and Ireland ; and in the former country we are told, on the best authority, that under a sermon preached at the kirk of Shotts, by Mr. Levingston, on June 21st, 1630, not fewer than five hundred souls were awakened and saved. If you read the Rev. John Wesley's Journals, you will learn that in the course of his effective ministry some thousands of persons were suddenly converted ; many of whom were convinced and brought to God in the course of one religious service. In the great revival of religion which took place in America under the ministry of President Edwards and his contemporaries, it was estimated that there were not fewer than thirty thousand conversions ; and it is stated by Mr. Finney, that but recently, in the same country, one hundred thousand persons obtained salvation in the course of one year ; and in both cases a large proportion were suddenly brought into a state of reconciliation. So lately

as 1834, some thousands were led to their Saviour in the Friendly Isles ; and a missionary who watched the progress of the gracious work, informs us, in one of his communications, that a thousand persons were converted in one day ; and not merely from paganism to Christianity, but, as far as he was able to ascertain, from Satan to God. I might refer to many other revivals of religion, which have been marked by large numbers of sudden conversions to God ; but I hope that you are now satisfied that such conversions are neither unphilosophical, unscriptural, nor unusual.

CONVERSATION III.

Hearer. THERE is another thing connected with what occurred last sabbath evening which to me appears mysterious. I do not understand how it was that those persons found salvation in the prayer meeting rather than under the sermon, when we are told it is by "the foolishness of preaching the Lord saves them that believe ;" and also that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Minister. I see no difficulty in accounting for that. Some had been awakened under the word, and others more deeply impressed with the importance of eternal things than they had previously been ; and their conversion was the result of the ministry of the truth. Nor should you forget that three or four short and pointed addresses were delivered during the prayer meeting, in which sinners were urged to an immediate surrender of themselves to God, and penitents directed and encouraged to accept of Christ as proposed to them in the gospel ; so that the word of reconciliation was as fully preached during that religious service as it had been in the more formal way of a sermon.

H. But as you advanced no new truths in the prayer meeting, I do not yet see why they appeared to be more effective in that service than during the sermon.

M. An agency in the conversion of souls was brought into exercise in the prayer meeting which did not operate during the ministration of the word. I mean social prayer.

H. And do you think social intercessory prayer has an influence with God ?

M. I do ; for he commands us to " pray one for another,"—to " pray for them that despitefully use us,"—to pray that " the Lord would

send forth labourers into his vineyard,"—to pray that the kingdom of Christ may come,—to pray that the Spirit be poured out from on high; and, in fact, to "pray for all men." Now, most assuredly he does not intend us to ask for blessings upon others, which he has determined shall not be granted. The apostle believed in the influence of intercessory prayer, when his "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel" was, "that they might be saved;" and when "without ceasing he made mention of the churches in his prayers;" yea, "night and day prayed exceedingly," that they might "increase and abound in love," and have their "hearts unblamable in holiness." And although the apostle was divinely called to the work of the ministry, and qualified by sundry gifts and graces for the discharge of its duties, yet he exhorted the church to pray for him, "that the word of the Lord might have free course, and run, and be glorified;" and earnestly besought its members to "strive with him, in their prayers to God for him," that he might discharge with fidelity and effect the various duties devolving upon him as an ambassador of Christ. The prayer of Abraham was heard for Abimelech; and in answer to his fervent supplications the Lord promised to spare Sodom, if but

ten righteous persons were found in it. The prayer of Moses was heard for Israel,—the prayer of Job for Eliphaz and his two friends,—the prayer of Samuel at Mizpah for the people of his charge,—the prayer of Elijah at Mount Carmel for blessings upon a most rebellious nation,—the prayer of the Canaanitish woman for her daughter,—the prayer of the centurion for his servant; and many other instances of the influence of intercessory prayer might be mentioned.

“ O wondrous power of faithful prayer !
 What tongue can tell the Almighty grace ?
 God’s hands or bound, or open are,
 As *Moses* or *Elijah* prays :
 Let *Moses* in the Spirit groan,
 And God cries out, ‘Let me alone !

“ Let me alone, that all my wrath
 May rise, the wicked to consume !
 While justice hears thy praying faith,
 It cannot seal the sinner’s doom :
 My Son is in my servant’s prayer,
 And Jesus forces me to spare.’ ”

St. James tells us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; that “ the prayer of faith shall save the sick; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” And as respects social prayer,

our Lord says, that “if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”

H. To what extent do you suppose the salvation of souls may be influenced by the united and fervent prayers of God’s people ?

M. I think a larger measure of divine influence, than otherwise they would receive, may be obtained for sinners in answer to believing prayer. They will not be saved without personal repentance and faith ; for no man can repent or believe for another ; yet they may be led to the possession of these blessings under the direction of that influence which has been granted in answer to prayer.

H. But if the prayers of God’s people be so availing, why are not more of those for whom they pray, even among their own relatives, made the partakers of salvation ?

M. Perhaps the conduct of the petitioners does not correspond with their prayers ; or the prayers offered are defective ; or the influence obtained is resisted by those to whom it is communicated. Religious instruction, as they may have ability to impart it, must be given by the Lord’s servants to those for whose conversion they intercede ; for if that be withheld,

when it is in their power to give it, there will be a discrepancy between their conduct and their prayers; and they can no more hope for success, than the husbandman who prays for his daily bread, while he neglects to cultivate his fields and sow his seed. And their prayers must not be a few cold wishes offered to God as a matter of course, or expressed at the conclusion of their devotions, merely for the sake of making a good finish; but the humble, fervent, agonizing, and believing intercession of souls travailing in birth for the salvation of sinners, and which will not let God rest until he "establish Jerusalem, and make her a praise in the earth." But if the conduct and intercessions of Christian believers be consistent with the Scriptures, and so effective as to secure the outpouring of the Spirit upon any number of persons, it does not necessarily follow that they must be saved. It will certainly place them in very favourable circumstances for obtaining salvation; but it will not place them under any irresistible influence, as that would be inconsistent with their condition as moral agents.

H. Then, after all you have said, it appears a doubtful case that souls will be saved in answer to the prayers of others.

M. Not so ; for let Christians feel their individual responsibility in reference to the souls of their fellow-creatures, and let them live, and labour, and speak, and pray for their conversion, and the desire of their hearts will, I have no doubt, in some degree at least, be granted. If some resist the influence brought upon them by the prayers of the faithful, others will yield to it, and glorify God in the day of their visitation. It is a deeply interesting and encouraging fact, which I have taken some trouble to ascertain, that, from the period when the disciples at Jerusalem, in obedience to the commands of their Lord, "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" for "the promise of the Father," to the present time, every revival with which the church has been blessed has been preceded by the spirit of special and earnest prayer for the influence of the Holy Ghost, and the conversion of sinners ; and individual conversions are continually occurring, which may be distinctly traced to the influence of intercessory prayer.

H. Will you favour me with the recital of a few cases ?

M. Most readily. The extraordinary work which began in Scotland on June 21st, 1630, already referred to, was evidently granted in

answer to prayer. The day preceding was the sabbath, on which the sacrament of the Lord's supper was administered; and many of the communicants, being convinced of the necessity of a revival of God's work, did not that evening retire to rest, but joined in little companies, and spent the whole night in devotional exercises, especially for the outpouring of the Spirit. The Lord heard their prayer, and gave a signal answer the very next day, in the conversion of five hundred souls under the preaching of Mr. Livingston. In the Friendly Isles a revival, perhaps never surpassed since the days of the apostles, was obtained in answer to prayer. The Rev. Peter Turner, one of the missionaries who witnessed the interesting visitation, says, "We all agreed to meet in private at the throne of grace every day at noon, to pray for a copious outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On Tuesday, July 23d, 1834, the Lord answered our prayers in an unexpected manner. While a local preacher was preaching at a village called Utui, on the compassion of Christ toward Jerusalem, many felt the spirit of deep conviction, and cried aloud for the disquietude of their souls. This soon became universal. They continued in prayer most of the night; during which time many

found mercy. I and brother Cargill went to give them some instruction, and to encourage the blessed work. The sabbath following a similar work commenced at Feleton, where there are five hundred persons; and all, from the least to the greatest, were earnestly seeking salvation. Soon it spread to every place in Vavou, and also to the smaller islands which form this group, on which there are inhabitants. On July 27th, we believe that not fewer than one thousand souls were converted to God; not now from dumb idols only, but from sin to righteousness, and from the power of Satan unto God." Now, this glorious revival, the blessed fruits of which are still remaining, was manifestly given in answer to prayer. The following interesting instance of prevailing intercessory prayer is given by an American minister. He says, "In a certain town there had been no revival for many years; the church was nearly run out; the youth were all unconverted, and desolation reigned unbroken. There lived in a retired part of the town an aged man, a blacksmith by trade, and of so stammering a tongue, that it was painful to hear him speak. On one Friday, as he was at work in his shop alone, his mind became greatly exercised about the state of the church,

and of the impenitent. His agony became so great, that he was induced to lay by his work, lock the shop door, and spend the afternoon in prayer. He prevailed; and called upon the minister on the sabbath, and desired him to appoint a conference meeting. After some hesitation, the minister consented; observing, however, that he feared but few would attend. He appointed it the same evening, at a large private house. When evening came, more assembled than could be accommodated in the house. All was silent for a time; until one sinner broke out in tears, and said, if any one could pray, he begged him to pray for him. Another followed, and another, and still another; until it was found that persons from every quarter of the town were under deep conviction; and, what was very remarkable, they all dated their conviction from the hour when the old man was praying in his shop. A powerful revival followed; and thus an old stammering man prevailed, and as a prince had power with God." Many other cases of a similar nature might be mentioned.

H. But can you mention any individual cases of conversion which have taken place in answer to intercessory prayer?

M. I could mention several; but perhaps two

will suffice. I was present at a prayer meeting in Yorkshire, some years ago, in which an excellent man engaged in prayer, and was led to wrestle for some time with amazing energy for those persons who were then desecrating the sabbath at the alehouse ; and he appeared as if, like Jacob, he would receive no denial. Not long after he had risen from his knees a stranger entered the chapel, evidently in distress ; and, in the course of the meeting, cried aloud for mercy. He was directed to the sinner's Friend ; and, by simple faith in the atonement, he obtained peace with God, and was made very happy. He now told us that he had been spending nearly the whole day at a neighbouring tavern with some of his pot companions ; but had in a moment received such a view of his sin, wretchedness, and danger, that he, lest the wrath of God should fall upon him, literally ran out of the house, and hastened to the chapel, with the view of seeking to be saved. Surely this was an answer to prayer. Another case was that of a youth of eighteen, who was much disposed to ridicule religion, and mock the servants of God. He went one Saturday evening, with several of his trifling companions, to hear a Methodist preacher in a cottage, with the view of disturbing the con-

gregation which might be assembled. On entering the cottage, he took his stand behind the door ; and immediately a large number of persons crowded in, filling not only the house, but the porch also, and so completely shutting him into a corner, behind the door, that it was impossible for him either to execute his wicked purpose, or to escape from his imprisonment. Here the word of the Lord reached his heart ; and here, for the first time in his life, did he sincerely and penitently cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" His conviction issued in conversion ; and being called to the work of the ministry, he offered himself for missionary services ; and, after spending about ten years in the foreign field, and being in "deaths oft," he returned to the land of his birth, where he now preaches the gospel. He often wondered at the powerful influence which so suddenly descended upon him, while a prisoner behind the door of the humble cottage ; but his wonder ceased when he ascertained that his pious mother had set apart that evening for special prayer on his behalf ; and that at the very time when he was awakened was she agonizing with God to save his soul. "The promise is to you and to your children," was her plea at the throne of grace. God saw her

anguish, heard her cry, honoured her faith, saved her son; and that son is he who now converses with you.

H. Your views of intercessory prayer involve a mystery which I cannot unravel; for if God communicate a larger measure of divine influence in answer to prayer than he would otherwise bestow upon transgressors, it would seem to prove that his people who earnestly pray have more love for sinners than himself, inasmuch as they obtain from him blessings which he would not bestow but for their benevolent interference.

M. You might as well say that the surgeon who saves the life of his patient is more benevolent than God, who gives him skill, and blesses the means employed for the accomplishment of that end. The fact is, that God employs means in the spiritual as well as in the physical world for the fulfilment of his purposes of wisdom and love; and intercessory prayer is one of those means. The benevolence which dictates such prayer is derived from God himself; the fire of zeal which animates the bosom of the petitioner is obtained from his altar; and, in fact, all the influences which prompt the effectual intercessory prayer have their origin in the love of God which is

shed abroad in the heart of the true believer. Moses never would have cried unto God in the anguish of his soul, and said, "If thou wilt not forgive their sins, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written," had he not been in audience with the Deity; nor would the apostle have said, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh," had not the love of Christ constrained him.

CONVERSATION IV.

Hearer. What you say certainly casts considerable light upon the subject; and yet, in my estimation, it does not sufficiently account for the persons being converted last sabbath evening in the prayer meeting, rather than during the ordinary service; as that service was not without earnest prayer offered up to God by yourself for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the conversion of sinners, and to which the congregation very heartily responded.

Minister. True; but during the prayer meeting there was *special* intercession for peni-

tents ; and they were in a position for receiving mercy, in which they were not found during the sermon.

H. Pray how do you make that appear ?

M. In this way :—an invitation was given to all persons who were truly penitent for sin, and earnestly desiring to embrace salvation, *then* to come forward to the altar, that they might receive suitable instruction, and an interest in the prayers of the congregation. They accepted that invitation ; knelt before the Lord, in the presence of his people ; and thus confessed themselves penitents seeking mercy.

H. And in what respect did that place them in more favourable circumstances for receiving salvation than when they were sitting under the word ? Was there any virtue in the particular *place* to which they were invited ?

M. Certainly not ; but their coming forward as they did was an act bringing out some great Scriptural principles, exceedingly favourable to their seeking and finding mercy. The act implied *decision*. Few persons, I imagine, will place themselves in such a position before a congregation who have not fully resolved to give their hearts to God at once. And when such a resolution is formed, and publicly avowed by them, you will easily perceive that they are

in a suitable state of mind to believe in Jesus to the saving of their souls. The act also implied *confession of sin*. According to the apostle, we are to "confess our faults one to another, and pray one for another, that we may be healed;" and when a person kneels at the altar, or at any place that may be set apart for penitents, the act is in itself a practical confession of sin, an open acknowledgment before God and the whole congregation that he is a sinner seeking mercy, and is thereby placed in a condition to apprehend those promises which are given to such as confess their sins. Nor is this all; for the act is directly opposed to those feelings and tendencies of human nature which struggle to prevent man from coming to seek salvation at the foot of the cross, and requires, on the part of the proud sinner, great humiliation to submit to it.

H. But where do you find any account of such an act in the Holy Scriptures?

M. I might reply to your question by asking another. I might inquire, "Where in the Scriptures do you find sabbath schools, class meetings, Bible societies, and missionary meetings, which have lately been introduced into the church?" I know you will very probably tell me that all these things, though not sup-

ported by Scriptural precedent, are nevertheless according to the very spirit and genius of the Christian religion, and bring out its ennobling and benevolent principles. I admit it, and claim the same thing for the act in question. God commands sinful men not to halt between two opinions, but to decide at once to serve him ; but human nature is so prone to procrastination, that many persons who are deeply convinced of sin under a sermon, will trifle with their convictions, and delay the great work of salvation from one period to another, until they entirely lose their good impressions. Now, as the act for which I plead is much calculated to prevent this, and to lead persons to an immediate decision for God, at the very time when their minds are most favourably impressed, and as it is consistent with the great principles of public worship, I maintain that it is in perfect harmony with the spirit of Christianity ; and it is not, therefore, marvellous that it should be so greatly blessed as the means of leading sinners to God. But I claim for it more than even the spirit of our holy religion, as we find in the Scriptures examples which certainly countenance the act. For instance : " Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and cried, Who is on the Lord's side ?

let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him." Joshua said to the children of Israel at a time of indecision among them, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve;" and they made their choice, and avowed it, saying, "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." Now, in both these cases a course was adopted which, like the one alluded to, implied decision. Indeed, the covenant into which Israel entered at different times to put away their sins, and consecrate themselves fully unto the Lord, embraced most obviously the same principles, as there was in it an open confession of sin and decision for God. And what was the baptism of John, but a service in which men publicly avowed themselves penitent sinners desiring to flee from the wrath to come?

H. After all you have said in its favour, I cannot help thinking that the plan is mechanical, and has too much of man in it.

M. It certainly has man in it, but only as a co-worker with God, which is a Scriptural duty. And as to its mechanical character, the same objection may be urged against many other religious services. For if that be mechanical which receives not only its *form*, but *mode of*

working, from man, the same name may be applied to nearly all the services of the sanctuary. Under the former dispensation the divine Being regulated minutely the very form and order of the public religious services which he required of his creatures ; but not so under the gospel. He has told us what services he requires of us, and the spirit in which they are to be performed ; but has left their outward form to be modified by man according to certain great principles which he has laid down. And have not all denominations of Christians availed themselves of this feature of the gospel ? If you look into the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, and the Methodist Church, you will perceive in each a form of religious service moulded and worked by the hand of man. The mere forms of divine worship, as well as the mode of doing good, differ very much among Christians of the present day who believe and teach the same essential doctrines. And most assuredly all of them differ in several important particulars from the apostolic patterns. I use the plural, as it is very obvious that the apostles themselves did not always abide by one form of conducting religious worship ; but in this matter, as well as in others, where they could do it without compromising principle,

they became all things to all men, that they might save some. If, therefore, the measure adopted last sabbath evening can be reconciled with those great principles which the Scriptures lay down for the regulation of Christian worship, its peculiar character is not sufficient to invalidate its Scriptural authority.

H. Will you have the kindness to name the principles to which you refer, that the measure may be tested thereby ?

M. The Scriptures, I think, require that every thing employed in religious worship, or the promotion of God's cause, should be consistent with solemnity, order, decorum, and spiritual edification. And what can be more solemn than to see those who have been convinced of sin under the word, present themselves before God and his people with broken and contrite hearts, that they may obtain salvation ? What can be more orderly than for such persons to commit themselves to the cause of Christ, and pay their vows to the Most High in the presence of his people ? Or what can be more decorous than for the followers of Christ to wrestle with God in mighty prayer, that he may save souls from death, and thus glorify their Redeemer ? And as respects its tendency to do good, I have no doubt

but many will have to praise God for it to all eternity ; for I have witnessed its blessed effects for several years as a means of leading hundreds to the foot of the cross, and the enjoyment of salvation.

H. But is not the act liable to great abuse ? and has it not often been placed in opposition to those very principles which you say should regulate public worship ?

M. I will not deny that if such assemblies as you witnessed last sabbath evening be left without a leader, as they sometimes are, or if they should be placed under the management of weak and unskilful persons, they may present scenes of unhallowed excitement and gross disorder ; but that is not chargeable on the act I now advocate, but to its perversion. It is well known that the holy eucharist is of divine appointment, and, when properly administered and devotionally received, tends to the edification of the soul ; but some of the Corinthians so perverted it, that they ate and drank to their own condemnation. The agapæ, or love-feasts, among the primitive Christians, were likewise highly beneficial when properly conducted ; but they were on some occasions so perverted as to contribute to intemperance and dissipation. But, indeed, if we are not to adopt

any mode of worship, or measure of usefulness, which is not liable to abuse, we certainly shall never worship God at all, nor do any good to the souls of our fellow-men. You did not, however, see any thing in the meeting referred to, which you could justly charge with opposition to that solemnity, order, and decorum, becoming the house of God, and which the Scriptures inculcate.

H. I cannot say that I did. But do you always conduct meetings for penitents as that was conducted last sabbath evening ?

M. I sometimes vary the form in a few particulars ; but as far as the great principles mentioned are concerned, I do. My general plan is to close the regular service, that those persons may withdraw who think proper to do so. I then commence the service of the prayer meeting by singing a hymn ; and when the persons withdrawing have left the chapel, I request a leader or local preacher to pray. After prayer I deliver a short address, and urge upon every sinner present, as God may give me ability, the necessity of an immediate attention to the concerns of the soul, and affectionately invite all who may be convinced of sin, and willing to make an entire surrender of themselves to God on gospel terms, to come

forward to the place assigned for penitents, with the view of obtaining mercy ; explaining, at the same time, my reasons for the plan recommended. Generally there is a solemn pause for a short time : then one and another come forward with anxious looks, and some with bitter tears, to humble themselves before the Lord. A hymn suited to the occasion is next sung by the congregation ; and in the mean time all that have presented themselves as seekers of salvation are spoken to, and instructed according to their respective conditions. Earnest prayer is now offered to God for them ; and in the course of an hour or two, generally speaking, most of them profess to obtain redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of their sins, and, like the publican, to go down to their houses justified. Never more than one person at the same time is permitted to pray aloud ; nor is the practice of singing different tunes at the same time ever tolerated. And if on any occasion there are indications of mere animal excitement, all present are requested to take their seats, excepting the penitents, who still remain kneeling, and I address them on subjects likely to lead to solemn and orderly devotion ; and I have never known such a measure fail in producing

the desired effect. My usual plan is likewise to deliver two or three short and pointed addresses during the meeting, in which the penitents are not only directed and encouraged, and the plan of salvation simplified, but the congregation cautioned against resisting the influence graciously vouchsafed, and invited and urged to co-operate with God in earnestly praying for the conversion of those whom he has convinced of sin.

CONVERSATION V.

Hearer. BUT I do not like the excitement which I think must necessarily be connected with such meetings as you advocate.

Minister. Nor can you be more opposed to mere excitement than I am. But would you condemn all excitement in religion ?

H. Yes : I would have ministers to address the understanding of man ; and endeavour by argument to convince him of the propriety of an immediate surrender of himself to God, rather than attempt to do or say any thing to engage his passions.

M. I differ from you ; for while I would have the former course attended to, I would not have the latter neglected. Man is both an intellectual and a feeling being, and should be dealt with accordingly. Religious truth, perhaps, can never reach the understanding of some men but through the medium of their passions, or not until their hearts are moved ; and that it does thus operate in such meetings as you saw last sabbath evening is certain, from numerous facts which have come within my own observation. For instance : a brother sees a sister, or a husband a wife, or a parent a child, weeping under ■ sense of guilt, and inquiring, it may be, with agony, as she prostrates herself before the Lord, what she must do to be saved. That brother, or husband, or parent, must be destitute of all sensibility not to be moved by such a spectacle. But how natural it is for the sinner to inquire at such a moment whether there be any adequate cause for this distress ! and most probably the answer to this inquiry will bring up the solemnities of eternity before his mind, and set his conscience at work. Thus the dream of thoughtlessness is interrupted ; the cord which binds the soul to the world loosed ; and a train of reflections commenced, which in all probability

will lead him to repentance and to God. Now in this case the understanding is reached through the medium of human sympathy. The first exercise of a soul in such a case will not be repentance,—it will not be even conviction of sin; but it will be simply a fellow-feeling for a beloved friend in distress. Nor is it acknowledged that there is any natural affinity between this state of mind and religion; yet the former constitutes a happy preparation for the latter, and is employed by the Holy Spirit as a medium through which he conveys truth to the understanding and the conscience. I remember an example of this in a prayer meeting in which I was present. A lady, her son, and two daughters were there; and one of the daughters, being convinced of sin under the word preached that evening, presented herself at the altar in great anguish of soul; which so affected her sister, that she soon followed her example. The first found peace, and in the overflowings of her happy and grateful soul exclaimed, "The Lord has saved me! O help me to praise him!" This so affected her brother, that he came forward, and began to cry for mercy. Nor was it long before his prayer was heard. His other sister found peace with God the very moment the Lord conferred that

blessing upon him. They rose from their knees, and hastened to tell their mother of their joy; but she violently pushed them from her, and in a state of intense anguish cast herself down among the penitents, and loudly exclaimed, "Is there no mercy for me?" I seldom have seen a person in greater distress than she manifested. God, however, met her in mercy, and gloriously revealed himself to her soul; which produced a remarkable change in her very countenance. She hastened to embrace her children, saying, "Now I can praise God with you;" and before the congregation did the mother and her three children hang upon each other's necks, while we sung the high praises of God for the wonder he had wrought. This took place a few years ago; and I am happy to say that the mother and one of the daughters remain steadfast, and the other two may be still holding on their way, for any thing I know to the contrary.

H. I perceive the propriety of your remarks, illustrated as they are by the case you have related; but still think that if truth is sometimes conveyed to the mind through the medium of the passions, persons should not be so much excited under its influence when it does reach the mind.

M. Perhaps it is impossible for them to prevent it. Tell a man that he is in danger every hour of being dragged from his beloved wife and children by the officers of the law, to be cast into prison, and is he not excited? Tell a traitor that the jury of his country has found him guilty; and that for his offence he must be "drawn and quartered," and is he not excited? Nor would you, as a Christian, think his excitement out of place, but, on the contrary, would be shocked to perceive apathy under such circumstances. And will you have a man to be solemnly told that he is a rebel against God, and every moment in danger of being cast into hell, and not excited? Will you contend that he should see his sin in its deepest hues, with all its circumstances of aggravation, and his immortal soul on the crumbling verge of hell, and not be excited? If there be any thing calculated to excite man, and awaken all his sensibilities, it is his condition as a sinner before God; and I am surprised that he is excited so little. A few weeks ago the whole town of B— was excited during a contested election for a member of parliament; and, if I am rightly informed, few partook more of that excitement than yourself; and yet you will have no excitement in religion!

H. The cases are not parallel.

M. I admit it; for in one case the election of a member to serve in parliament was the cause of excitement; but in the other, the salvation of immortal souls is the cause of it! To partake in the former excitement you appear to consider rational and manly; but to partake in the latter, irrational and weak. It would, therefore, appear that, in your estimation, things temporal are more interesting than things spiritual and eternal; and that a seat in parliament is more to be desired and struggled for than a seat in heaven!

H. Not so; but I think it inconsistent with the subject for persons to yield so much to their feelings as to cry out, and in other respects to evince their excitement before a congregation; and as there is no warrant in Scripture for such proceedings, they should be discouraged and prevented.

M. I do not agree with you; for if you will carefully examine the New Testament you will find that persons under conviction frequently evinced great excitement. For instance: many on the day of Pentecost, being pricked in their hearts, cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And the Philippian jailer was so affected under conviction, that he came trem-

bling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Nor do these appear to have been isolated cases; for the apostle, in giving directions to the Corinthian church relative to the decorum of public worship, says, "If all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." Here is a clear intimation that "*falling down*" was the result of powerful excitement, produced by apostolic preaching, and perfectly consistent with that decorum in the house of God, for which the apostle contends in the chapter whence the quotation is taken.

H. But whatever might have been during the apostolic age, is not the excitement of which we speak now confined to the Wesleyan societies?

M. Certainly not. There has been great excitement in many, if not in all, orthodox churches, both in this and in other countries.

H. Will you have the kindness to state a few instances?

M. Most certainly. In the Church of Scot-

land, at Stewarton, there was an extensive revival of religion in 1625; and the minister who details its particulars informs us that "many were so choked and taken by the heart, that they have been made to fall over, and thus carried out of the church; but have after proved most solid and lively Christians." And in consequence of persons under conviction falling down and crying out, the same minister states that the good work was by the profane rabble of that town called "the Stewarton sickness." Revivals in the same country, and connected with the same church, took place at Shotts, in 1730; Cambuslang, Baldernock, Kirkintilloch, Muthill, and at some other places, in 1742; in which there are said to have been "outcries," "bodily agitations," and other appearances of powerful excitement. And at Kilsyth, only a few months ago, the same things were witnessed in connection with a revival in that town. A minister who describes the revival informs us, that on July 23d, 1839, while the Rev. W. Burns, jun., was preaching in the church, "he clasped his hands, lifted his eyes to heaven, and in an agony of prayer for the Holy Ghost to descend upon the people, exclaimed, 'O come! come!' and being strengthened in his faith, cried, 'He is coming! he is

coming!' Suddenly a voice was heard from among the congregation, 'He is come! He is come! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Glory be to God!' This ran like electricity through the whole assembly of fifteen hundred persons; and the scene which succeeded will not admit of description. Here was the formalist, of fifty years' standing in the church, shaking from head to foot, and crying aloud for mercy. Then the cry was heard, 'What must I do to be saved?' while others were, in exultation, exclaiming, 'Behold, God is become my salvation!' An elder, who was endeavouring to direct and comfort his aged mother, was seized by the convincing power of the Spirit; and with a voice which, had it not been heard whence it came, could scarcely have been believed to be human, cried out, 'O Christ, have mercy on my soul! O break this hard heart!' Presently one ran to the manse with tidings of what had taken place in the church, when one of the ministers ascended the pulpit, gave a few words of advice, sung, prayed, and dismissed the congregation. But although they left the church, many persons would not and did not go home till God had blessed them. The vestry was filled with penitents: other places in the town were opened for them; and

scenes were witnessed that day in Kilsyth, the like of which had not been known within the memory of any then living. Since then the good work has advanced ; all the churches have been greatly owned of God ; the places of worship well attended ; and numbers have felt the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation."

Similar scenes have been witnessed in Ireland, at different periods, in the Presbyterian Church of that country. Mr. Blair states that, in 1645, in the province of Ulster, a glorious revival took place ; and that "the people, finding themselves condemned by the mouth of God, speaking in his word, fell into such anxiety and terror of conscience, that they looked upon themselves as altogether lost ; and this work appeared not in one single person or two, but multitudes were brought to understand their ways, and to cry out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved ?' I have seen them myself stricken into a swoon with the word ; yea, a dozen in one day carried out of doors as dead ; so marvellous was the power of God, smiting their hearts for sin, condemning and killing. And of these were none of the weaker sex or spirits, but indeed some of the boldest men, who formerly feared not with their swords

to put a whole market-town into a fray." Since that period scenes of a similar character have repeatedly occurred in the island.

In America the same things are witnessed in revivals connected with the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, and Independent Churches of that country. Mr. Rowland, who was a minister at Hopewell, says, "On October 6th, 1739, in a night-meeting, several persons cried out so very awfully, that I was constrained to conclude. After sermon, I took an opportunity to inquire of those persons what was the real cause of their crying out in such a manner: some of whom answered me, that they saw hell opening before them, and themselves ready to fall into it: others said, they were struck with such a sense of their sinfulness, that they were afraid the Lord would never have mercy upon them. Their convictions were attended with great horrors, and trembling, and loud weeping; which I suppose could not be stopped so easily as some people imagine: for I observed that many continued crying in the most doleful manner along the road on their way home; and it was not in the power of man to prevail with them to refrain, for the word of the Lord remained like a fire upon their hearts." From that period to the

present, the churches of America have experienced many visits from on high, and most of them have been marked with great excitement; and many with outcries, and bodily contortions, as I am able to testify from personal observation.

Nor has the Established Church of this country been without excitement. At Everton church, under the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Berridge, there was a mighty power of the Spirit, which was attended with intense excitement. An eye-witness of that revival describes it thus:—"On Sunday, May 20th, 1759, Mr. Berridge's text was, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' When the power of religion began to be spoken of, the presence of God really filled the place; and while poor sinners felt the sentence of death in their souls, what sounds of distress did I hear! The greatest number of those who cried, or fell, were men; but some women, and several children, felt the power of the same almighty Spirit, and seemed just sinking into hell. This occasioned a mixture of various sounds, some shrieking, and some roaring aloud. The most general was a loud breathing, like that of people half strangled, and gasping for life; and indeed almost all the

■ IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER MEETINGS.

cries were like those of human creatures dying in bitter anguish. Great numbers wept without any noise; others fell down as dead; some sinking in silence, some with extreme noise and violent agitation. I stood on the pew-seat, ■ did a young man in the opposite pew, an able-bodied, fresh, healthy countryman; but in a moment, while he seemed to think of nothing less, down he dropped with a violence inconceivable. The adjoining pews seemed to shake with his fall; and I heard afterward the stamping of his feet, ready to break the boards, ■ he lay in strong convulsions at the bottom of the pew."

I might easily multiply examples; but I hope you will think these sufficient as a reply to your inquiry, proving, as they most satisfactorily do, that excitement in religion is not confined to the Wesleyans: and if it should be more frequent among them than some other sections of the church, it would in my estimation only prove that, among the Wesleyans, awakenings and conversions were more numerous than in other religious communities.

H. But many persons obtain religion without any excitement.

M. I very much question that; as it appears to me impossible for any man to pass through

the process of regeneration without excitement. He feels condemned, in danger, is anxious and distressed ; and he wrestles, flees for refuge, and passes from death unto life ; all which things most assuredly imply excitement. It is true that all persons are not equally excited ; nor does the excitement always manifest itself in the same way, but is very considerably regulated by the natural temperament of its subjects. On a summer evening, while two sisters were amusing themselves in the drawing-room, a messenger arrived, who informed them that their beloved brother had fallen into the river, and was drowned. One of them shrieked, fell from her chair, and went into fits ; the other turned as pale as death, uttered not a word, nor moved from her seat. Both were excited, fearfully excited ; but that excitement was very different in its effects. Now, were those two sisters to be awakened under the word, and feel the same power of conviction ; and were they to be induced to come forward as penitents at a prayer meeting, to seek salvation, the probability is, that the former would cry aloud, but that the latter would be solemn, thoughtful, and still. Nor is temperament the only thing affecting excitement, but it is also, to a certain extent, governed by the measure of influence

felt, the degree of knowledge possessed, and the suddenness of the operation experienced. Let not him, therefore, who is powerfully excited, condemn him that is not; neither let him who is not powerfully excited, condemn him that is.

H. I perceive now that it is neither unscriptural, uncommon, nor unphilosophical, for men to be greatly excited under the convincing power of the Holy Spirit, especially if they be of a certain temperament, and if their convictions be sudden and deep: but why did you not reprove the extravagance of that female, last sabbath evening, who, on finding salvation, fell on the floor, and, on recovering from her swoon, cried out, "Glory! glory! I am saved! I am saved!" You will certainly admit that to have been wrong?

M. Assuredly not. The young woman, as you know, was in great distress about her soul; and as soon as she believed in Christ, and obtained a sense of his pardoning love, the change was so sudden, great, and glorious, that she was completely overcome. Excessive joy, as well as excessive grief, will sometimes occasion swooning. When I was in the West Indies, a soldier, condemned by a court martial, was led out to be shot. His coffin was placed before

him, upon which he was requested to kneel ; and the regiment to which he belonged was drawn up to witness the affecting scene. A bandage was placed over the eyes of the unhappy culprit, and the chaplain, after commanding his soul to God, had left him, when the commanding officer cried, in a solemn but firm tone, " Make ready ! Present !" and then, instead of commanding the soldiers to fire, as the unfortunate man expected, he stepped up to him, and said, " The governor pardons you !" The soldier on hearing this fell from his coffin, and instantaneously swooned ; but on coming to himself, he clapped his hands for joy, and loudly exclaimed, " God bless the governor ! He has saved my life ! He has saved my life !" Nor did any person think such behaviour extravagant, or out of character. It is, therefore, no wonder that the female was overcome by a change in her condition even more important than that of the soldier ; or that, on coming to herself, and finding she was pardoned, and had the love of God shed abroad in her heart by the Holy Ghost given unto her, she should have given expression to her grateful and joyous feelings. The lame man that received the use of his feet was so joyful, that he entered the temple " leaping and praising God."

CONVERSATION VI.

Hearer. I PERCEIVED that when any person professed to find salvation, you sung the doxology, or some verse of praise.

Minister. We did, because we were thankful and glad for the important blessing conferred. When persons under the ministry of Mr. Wesley found peace, he sometimes stopped in his discourse to praise God on their behalf. Under the date of July 24th, 1749, he thus writes in his Journal :—“ What a blessing it is when any one who finds peace, declares it openly before all the people, that we may break off, and praise the Lord ! If this were always done, it would be good for many souls. The first that found it on Sunday evening, spoke before all, and we praised God. The moment she spoke another and another found peace, and each of them spoke aloud, and made the fire run through the whole congregation.” The salvation of the soul was regarded by the first race of Methodists as a blessing so invaluable, that public thanks were frequently given by the parties receiving it. On June 3d, 1762, Mr. Wesley makes the following entry in his Journal :—“ Between Monday morning and Tuesday night

I have had eight bills of thanksgiving ; for two justified, three renewed in love, and three back-sliders healed." Nor is thanksgiving on the conversion of souls peculiar to the Wesleyans ; for both in Scotland and America, among different religious denominations, has the practice been observed ; and even days of public thanksgiving have been kept for sinners saved during seasons of gracious revivals.

H. But while some were singing, or rather shouting, the praises of God, others were weeping aloud ; and if that be not confusion, I know not what is.

M. It was confusion in which the Lord saw delightful order, and over which angels rejoiced. Similar confusion was witnessed when the foundation of the second temple was laid ; for we are told that some "wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud for joy : so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people : for people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." Mr. Wesley often witnessed similar scenes. Speaking of his visit to Gwennap, on Sunday, July 5th, 1747, he informs us that it was "difficult to be heard in meeting the society amid the cries of those on the one hand who were pierced through as

with a sword, and of those on the other who were filled with joy unspeakable."

H. You surely do not intend to be the advocate of noisy meetings, as they cannot but offend the taste of educated persons ?

M. Unmeaning noise is as objectionable to me as it can be to you ; but there may be sanctified noise ; and it is quite possible for persons to be too much afraid of noise, and thereby grieve the Holy Spirit. There was sometimes very considerable noise in the worship of God's ancient people, and especially when they offered praise to his great name, and which he most gloriously sanctioned at the dedication of the temple. If you read the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, you will there find a deeply interesting account of the services at the dedication of the temple. We are informed that " Solomon had brought in all the things which David his father had dedicated :" then it is said that " the Levites brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle ;" and that they " sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told or numbered for multitude ;" but as yet there was no indication of divine acceptance,—no glory filling the temple. " But it came to pass," when the

Levites, who were the singers, "lifted up their voice with the trumpets, and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever : that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord." Thus the Lord honoured the praises and thanksgivings of his servants, which with a loud voice and much noise were presented to him. No marvel, therefore, that the prophet of Israel should have said, "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion ; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." And when a prodigal comes home, is it not meet that the family should make merry ? You would probably allow a man to be quite enthusiastic, and even shout aloud, at a concert of music, in the field of battle, and on occasions when great events are celebrated ; and would you have him as cold as marble, unfeeling as clay, and dull as lead, when an immortal soul is saved ? It is true that the salvation of a soul excites but little interest in this degenerate world : there is no ringing of bells, no flourishing of trumpets, no firing of guns, no illumination of cities, no display of fire-works, nor is any medal struck to commemorate the glorious event ; and yet it excites ■ deeper interest

among the angelic host than all the exploits of bravery which mark the battle-field, and throw whole nations into ecstasies of joy ; for while angels pass by those exploits without even once stopping to strike their lyre, they swell the heavenly chorus, and throughout all their shining ranks rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. And shall not we rejoice also, whose duty it is to do God's will on earth, as angels do it in heaven ? And if their praises before the throne resemble "the voice of many waters," and "the voice of mighty thunderings," shall we be afraid to shout the high praises of God, when with majesty and mercy he takes the prey from the mighty, and saves ■ soul from death ?

H. There is certainly much plausibility in what you say ; but I think you will not be able to meet with the same effect another objection to what I witnessed last sabbath evening. Some little children professed to find peace with God.

M. They did. And what was there objectionable in that ?

H. Why, I must say, to be candid, that I do not think they understood what they were about.

M. Did you converse with any of them ?

H. No; but I thought them too young to be converted.

M. I most decidedly differ from you; for the Scripture teaches us to expect the conversion of children, and that in large numbers. David informs us that this is one way in which the Lord will "still the enemy and the avenger," and thus set his "glory above the heavens." His language is, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." "When the man of middle age or declining years becomes pious, the infidel thrusts his hand into his bosom, and drags forth some selfish and base motive to account for the professed change;" but what can he say when the grace of God shines forth in all the artless simplicity of little children? The Lord loves young disciples, and they that seek him early shall find him. His language is, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Then beware how you object to the conversion of children, lest the Saviour should reprove you as he did the chief priests and scribes, who besought him to restrain the children of the temple, when with gladdened hearts they

cried, "Hosanna to the son of David." It is a pleasing fact, that in almost every revival of religion, with which the Christian church has been favoured, many children have been brought to God. In some places they have been the first-fruits of a revival; and many excellent and useful Christians, now of considerable standing in the church, were, to my certain knowledge, converted in their childhood, and have subsequently given the most conclusive evidence that their conversion was genuine. And why should we not expect the conversion of children? Is not "the promise unto us and to our children?" And has not God promised to "pour his Spirit upon our seed, and his blessing upon our offspring?" It would be well if pious parents would plead these promises at the throne of grace, earnestly, and in faith; and I have no doubt that many more children would be converted to God.

H. As soon as you had praised God for the persons finding peace, I perceived that you immediately sent them into the adjoining vestry. Pray what was that for?

M. I will inform you. There were in the vestry two or three pious and judicious class-leaders, waiting to converse with them on the subject of their conversion, that they might, in

the absence of excitement, endeavour to ascertain how far the work was genuine, and give them such advice as they might deem suitable. There was also a person in the vestry to take the addresses of such professed converts, with the view of their being visited in the course of the week at their own houses. A correct list of the persons thus obtained was sent to the leaders' meeting on Wednesday evening, where it was divided among the leaders, who kindly engaged to visit all the persons whose names were found on that list, with the view of encouraging their hearts in the Lord, and of getting them to meet in class, if not already connected with some section of the Christian church.

H. That I must say was a judicious plan, and calculated to produce permanent benefit; for I can easily conceive that if such persons are not watched over with care and affection, they are likely to lose their good, and become again entangled in the yoke of bondage. But as I wish to know the whole matter connected with these meetings, you will probably inform me what were those books which I perceived in the hands of those professed converts when they returned from the vestry.

M. One was, "The Serious Inquirer after

Salvation affectionately addressed," which the leaders had given to each person with whose state they were not so satisfied as to believe he had really found peace with God ; and the other was, "The New Convert directed and encouraged," which they had given to those of whose Scriptural conversion they did not entertain any doubt. Both are small works, [published at the Methodist Book Concern,] the former of which simplifies the way of salvation, and the latter contains plain and suitable directions to mere babes in Christ ; and in the first instance were both specially prepared for such distribution ; that, if possible, the good impressions made in these prayer meetings might be permanent. The date of the year, and the name of each individual, receiving either of these books, were inscribed thereon, that if he should afterward prove unfaithful, the little book, with its inscription, might, by the blessing of God, recall to his mind impressions and enjoyments lost, and thus, as an humble monitor, lead him again to repentance.

H. I think I have heard that persons who take a part in revival prayer meetings are not the most amiable or catholic in their disposition, but disposed to be uncharitable and cen-

sorious. There are, no doubt, exceptions ; but I now speak generally.

M. That some of them are censorious, I am not prepared to deny. This I most sincerely regret. But are not others also censorious ? If persons provoke censoriousness, by uncharitable speeches and proceedings, they should certainly not hold themselves guiltless. Say, for instance, a Christian who received his first spiritual benefit at one of these meetings,—and who, believing them to be highly beneficial, engages in them with all his heart,—hears others not only refuse their co-operation in such meetings, but even ridicule them, and represent their advocates and supporters as weak-minded fanatics ; you can hardly wonder if he should be powerfully tempted to think, and even to say, that such persons are not influenced by the Spirit of Christ. Censoriousness has done much harm to the work of the Lord, and should be discountenanced to the utmost in every legitimate way ; but it is certainly not all on one side ; but perhaps, on an impartial investigation, it will be found to be most on the side of those who are loudest in their complaints against it.

H. Are not families often thrown into dis-

order, and domestic duties neglected, by such meetings being continued too late ?

M. I fear that in some cases they are : and it is my opinion, after considerable experience in such meetings, that they never ought, on any occasion, to be held later than ten o'clock ; and never so late as that, unless there be a very special influence felt. The heads of families engaging in them should invariably have family worship before they come to the evening service, that no loss at home may be sustained by their exertions in the prayer meeting. This plan I know is adopted by many excellent prayer leaders with good effect.

H. But after all you have said on the subject, do you believe that the cause of religion is really served by revivals which such meetings as you advocate are intended to promote and maintain ?

M. Most certainly.

H. But I think I have heard it stated that Christian communities in which revivals have taken place have not been ultimately benefited by them, either as respects their numerical or spiritual condition ; but, in the lapse of a few years, have found themselves in no better circumstances than those communities which had not been so visited.

M. I am happy to have it in my power to prove to the contrary, by a statement of facts communicated to me in a letter by my highly esteemed friend, the Rev. Samuel Dunn, of Gamborne. Under the date of February 22d, 1840, he thus writes :—“ During the last thirty years Cornwall, perhaps, has been more favoured with revivals of religion than any other part of the kingdom. It has, however, been frequently remarked, that this has been of no real advantage ; that after such large accessions the *decrease* has been nearly equal to the *increase*. The following statement, however, of members of society in the Cornish district, will show that this is not correct :—

In 1810 the number was 6,601.

In 1820 ditto 10,585.

In 1830 ditto 14,366.

In 1840 the number is 22,871.

“ Or, take the three circuits in which there have been the most extensive revivals during that period.

“ First, *Redruth*, including Camborne and Tuckington :—

In 1810 the number was 1,741.

In 1820 ditto 2,733.

In 1830 the number was 3,356.

In 1840 the number is 5,720.

“ Second, *Truro*, including St. Agnes and Gwennap :—

In 1810 the number was 1,403.

In 1820 ditto 2,340.

In 1830 ditto 3,085.

In 1840 the number is 4,012.

“ Third, *Penzance*, including St. Ives and St. Just :—

In 1810 the number was 1,384.

In 1820 ditto 2,038.

In 1830 ditto 2,611.

In 1840 the number is 5,200.

“ Total number of members in these three circuits :—

In 1810 the number was 4,528.

In 1820 ditto 7,111.

In 1830 ditto 9,053.

In 1840 the number is 14,932.

“ In these three circuits there were, in 1810, only ten travelling preachers. There are now on the ~~same~~ ground twenty-one.

"From the above you will perceive that we have no cause to fear revivals, but earnestly to pray that they may increase yet more and more, till the millions of the human family be gathered into the fold of Christ. I may add, that, as far as my observation has extended, a larger proportion of the persons brought into the society during revivals have been soundly converted to God, than of those who have entered in the ordinary way."

H. Have not other parts of the Wesleyan connection advanced with equal rapidity?

M. Certainly not. Yorkshire stands next to Cornwall in numerical increase, because next to it in times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. But if we look at the number of members in the whole of Great Britain, exclusive of Cornwall, we shall find a very powerful argument in favour of revivals.

In 1810 the number was 131,374.

In 1820 ditto 180,632.

In 1830 ditto 222,873.

In 1840 the number now

is 300,307.

Had other districts in Great Britain advanced in the same ratio with Cornwall, instead of numbering but 300,307 members, their number would have been 455,188, or 154,881 more than they are. It is impossible to look at this without perceiving the benefit of revivals; and as many thousands have been added to the Wesleyan societies in Yorkshire by means of such seasons of grace, were we to compare the united members of Cornwall and Yorkshire with those of other counties in Great Britain, the results of religious revivals would appear to still greater advantage.

CONVERSATION VII.

Hearer. If I were not afraid of being troublesome, it would afford me much pleasure to make a few more inquiries on the subject of revival prayer meetings.

Minister. So long as your object is to gain information and spiritual benefit, you will find me quite disposed to answer any of your inquiries to the utmost of my power.

H. If such meetings as you advocate be not only in accordance with the Scriptural principles of religious worship, but so very useful, why are they not patronized by all pious ministers of the gospel?

M. Perhaps every minister is not convinced of their utility. He has never held such meetings himself; and the representations he has heard from others have tended to prejudice his mind against them; or perhaps he has been present at such meetings, where no minister or competent person took their management, and has been shocked with their disorder and apparent irreverence; or he may possibly have known persons accustomed to take a prominent part in such assemblies, not

so upright in their walk and conversation as they ought to have been, and has, therefore, felt disgusted. Another reason may be found in the *pride of intellect*. It is a very prevailing opinion, that for a minister to engage in a prayer meeting after preaching, and endeavour to get the people saved before they leave the sanctuary, is a very unintellectual thing; and that none but ministers of a low grade of intellect will countenance it. I once heard a highly esteemed individual say, that he did not want a prayer meeting revivalist for his minister, but an intellectual man. How far this opinion is founded in truth, I shall not now stop to inquire, it being enough for my present purpose merely to state that such an opinion most certainly exists; and, in all probability, it is the chief reason which prevents some men from engaging in revival prayer meetings; for it must require much grace for a man of brilliant parts to be made willing to be counted a fool for Christ's sake; and perhaps not the less for those who *desire* to be considered as possessing those parts, to submit to a mode of working that is deemed so unintellectual. But there is another cause, not yet mentioned, which operates, I have no hesitation in saying, to prevent other

ministers from engaging in revival prayer meetings :—they are convinced of their utility, would be willing to endure any reproach in the path of duty, and do any thing to save souls ; but they think they have no adaptation for this kind of work, and are thereby deterred from engaging in it. I know this is the case with some of my most esteemed brethren in the ministry, the latchet of whose shoes I feel myself unworthy to unloose. Nor should it be forgotten that the conducting of such meetings after a hard day's labour, such as Wesleyan ministers generally have on the sabbath, requires a physical energy which every man does not possess ; and some who do possess it, choose to meet the society according to Mr. Wesley's directions, to administer special advice, and thus endeavour to perform the very important work of building up and establishing the church, rather than engage in a service for which they probably feel themselves less qualified.

H. But many pious men, not in the ministry, are strongly prejudiced against such meetings.

M. Pious men are liable to err in their judgment, and may entertain very unfounded prejudices against certain measures of useful-

ness, without implicating, in any degree, their religious character. Their prejudices may originate in no hostility to the cause of Christ, but in erroneous judgment, perhaps hastily formed on the testimony of others, rather than on the evidence arising from a personal and unbiased investigation. I believe this to be the case with many deeply pious men; and I am, therefore, prepared to make allowance for unreasonable prejudices on the subject, and to treat with Christian courtesy and kindness persons whose views relative to prayer meetings may not accord with my own.

H. But is not much prejudice against such meetings excited by the inconsistency of some of their reputed converts? I had a person in my employment who professed to find salvation at one of them; but he still continued to lie, and pilfer from his master.

M. Such cases as you mention sometimes occur, and are undoubtedly very prejudicial; but they no more disprove the spiritual and useful character of such meetings, than persons acting a similar part, who profess to have obtained salvation under the ministry of the word, disprove the divine authority and usefulness of gospel preaching. There was a blessed work at Samaria under the preaching

of Philip, and Simon the sorcerer was numbered with its reputed converts, and admitted to the ordinance of Christian baptism ; but when Peter and John were come, and he “saw that through the laying on of their hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost;” thus proving himself to be “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” If, therefore, the work of prayer meetings is to be designated spurious, and regarded as the effect of mere animal excitement, because some of their reputed converts prove themselves deceivers, the same argument would prove that the work at Samaria was spurious, and that Philip, Peter, and John were under delusion when they thought the Lord had poured out his Spirit upon that city, because Simon the sorcerer professed to have found salvation. Indeed, it would go to prove that no revival had ever taken place in the church ; for wherever the Lord has sown good seed, the enemy has sown tares also. Nor should it be forgotten that many receiving good at prayer meetings, if not carefully watched over, may lose that good, and become again entangled with the yoke of bondage.

H. What you say is very correct; but I have been told that in some prayer meetings for penitents many very objectionable things take place; things which I certainly did not witness last sabbath evening; but which I understand are, nevertheless, very common in such assemblies, and are also the occasion of much prejudice.

M. To what things do you refer?

H. I refer to the practice of certain individuals walking about the chapel from one pew to another, and talking to persons about their souls. .

M. It is my opinion that the practice ought in general to be discontinued; and that, in most cases, if persons do not come forward among the penitents at the invitation of the preacher, they ought not to be further urged to it; as I have sometimes known individuals, in consequence of indiscreet importunity, induced to present themselves as penitents, who were not even awakened to a sense of their danger as guilty sinners. In some cases the practice may be adopted with beneficial results, and timid spirits thereby encouraged to take up their cross, and decide for God; and others, by a "word fitly spoken," may be led

to conviction and repentance ; but the parties engaging in this prominent and delicate work should not be mere novices, but men of known character, judgment, and piety. Some years ago I frequently thus spoke to persons ; but being censured by an esteemed colleague for doing so, I resolved to take his advice, and in future avoid the occasion of offence : but no sooner had I come to that resolution, than a respectable tradesman, in deep distress, waited upon me ; stated that he had been awakened the preceding evening by a simple question I had proposed to him in his pew, and that he wished to be further instructed. He gave me five pounds, unsolicited, for a religious society ; soon afterward found peace with God ; and has for some years been a successful leader in the Wesleyan society.

H. But I understand that even more objectionable things than I have yet mentioned occasionally occur in these meetings. I have been told that some of the prayer leaders not only whisper to females in such a way as is offensive to modesty, but in other respects treat them with unwarranted familiarity, and thus excite much prejudice in every properly constituted mind.

M. Such things cannot be too strongly condemned, and no person can feel a greater repugnance to them than myself. In a service so solemn the very appearance of evil should be avoided, and every thing done as in the special presence of God; or that which is good will be evil spoken of, and a prejudice excited that may issue in the loss of souls. But although I admit that persons of indiscreet zeal, little acquainted with the rules of polite society, and who are not possessed of exquisite sensibilities, may have unwittingly on some occasions violated the laws of strict propriety, yet I believe their indiscretions have, in general, been greatly magnified by mere spectators, who have sought the failings of men rather than the blessing of God.

H. Another thing to which I would refer as objectionable in some of those meetings, is the way in which penitents are sometimes spoken to. I have been informed that, on some occasions, two or three persons at the same time have been observed shouting into the ears of a poor sinner in distress, and expressing themselves in different language, and with much incoherency.

M. That is a practice which is decidedly

wrong, and ought never to be allowed. In my humble opinion it is right for the officiating minister, in conjunction with those persons selected for that purpose, to ascertain, as correctly as possible, the views and feelings of the parties professing to seek mercy, and then, in few words, to give them such clear and pointed advice as their circumstances may require; never forgetting to simplify the plan of salvation to the humble penitent, and to encourage him at once to believe. This is, however, a very important and critical work, requiring much judgment; and ought never to be undertaken but by persons of decided piety, and who are well acquainted with the human heart.

H. And how would you have penitents directed?

M. That must depend upon the particular state of mind in which they are found. Some may fear that they are too unworthy to attract the notice of God; others, that their sins are too numerous and aggravated to be forgiven; others, that they have not been long enough in a penitent state to find mercy; others, that their hearts are too hard to obtain the divine blessing now; others, that Christ has not died

for them; and others, that they have sinned away their day of grace. Some may be so ignorant of the way of salvation as to say they love God, but are not happy; others, that they believe in Christ, but are not pardoned; others, that they are very comfortable, but cannot believe; others, that they feel God has pardoned them, but they want the witness of the Spirit; and others will be found labouring under errors of a different form. Now you will at once perceive that each of these cases requires a different mode of treatment; and that advice which would be highly appropriate for one, would be very improper for another. Besides, some persons may possibly present themselves among the penitents that are not truly such themselves, but simply desiring to be saved, and will of course require different treatment from any of the rest. It, therefore, requires great discrimination, as well as established piety, to speak to penitents with effect. I have often found the following method successful:— After having ascertained the respective cases of the persons seeking mercy, to give them a public address, endeavouring to describe, as briefly as possible, the case of each, and to meet it with plain Scriptural instructions. The

Lord has on some occasions so applied the word thus spoken, that more than twenty persons during the short address have been enabled to believe to the saving of their souls; and on one occasion, upward of thirty entered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

H. Might not prayer meetings for penitents be conducted so as to avoid offence?

M. I think not. If the advice I have ventured to give in these conversations were generally acted upon, I think all *just* cause of offence would be removed; but let God continue to work in these meetings in the conviction and conversion of souls, and, in my opinion, the offence of the cross will not cease. Nor should we be too solicitous about its ceasing. I would certainly lay no occasion of stumbling in a brother's way, but labour as far as possible, without the sacrifice of principle, to please all men for their good unto edification; but it is impossible to meet every taste, and to adapt our mode of working to the views and prejudices of all; and we should be very careful that we do not bring mere worldly policy into the church, with the view of pleasing certain parties, to the hinderance

of the work of God, as I have known that course exceedingly restrain the energies and injure the usefulness of some men. Besides, it is hardly possible that such meetings can be entirely faultless. If God were the sole agent in them, we might expect to find them like himself, perfect; but man also is an agent, a co-worker with God; and, as an old theologian has very properly, though somewhat quaintly, said, "Nothing passes through the hands of man unsullied, or upon which he does not leave the print of his fingers."

H. But I know good men, having no prejudice against such meetings, and making ample allowances for every irregularity, who say they never feel at home in them. How do you account for that?

M. Do they try to feel at home? Perhaps they stand at a distance, and look on as mere spectators, instead of assisting in the work. It is well known that many professors of religion, occasionally attending these meetings, not only refuse their public co-operation, but may be seen, during a powerful influence, while penitents in deep distress are calling for the prayers of the congregation, so far forgetting themselves as to be gazing about most irreverently,

instead of agonizing with God in prayer to save souls. Surely you cannot wonder that they do not enjoy such meetings. It would be strange if they did. It is my conviction that the presence of persons thus conducting themselves grieves the Holy Ghost; and often renders such meetings less productive of good than they otherwise would be.

H. But you will allow that there is great variety in the mental constitution of men.

M. Most assuredly. Variety marks all the works of God. Philosophers inform us that there are no two things exactly alike; but that a difference between any two leaves, or any two blades of grass, which may be selected, will be very perceptible when subjected to microscopic investigation. Certain it is, that the configuration of no two human countenances is precisely the same; and doubtless a similar variety exists in the intellectual nature of man.

H. You must then admit that some men more than others are adapted to prayer meeting operations; and what may be edifying to one may not be so to another.

M. To a considerable extent I do. Some persons certainly have more adaptation for the

work of prayer meetings than others ; but is it not to be feared that in some cases the great hinderance to co-operation is the fear of reproach, and that the want of adaptation is pleaded as a mere subterfuge, especially as the deficiency is thought creditable, rather than otherwise, to their intellectual character ?

H. If I am not much mistaken, I know persons willing to submit to any opprobrium if they might be useful ; but are induced to keep aloof from such meetings, from a conviction that they have no talent for usefully engaging therein.

M. And I am sure that I know some of the same character ; but no person can satisfactorily judge of his powers until he has fully tried them ; and I have no doubt that many persons who take no part in such meetings would find that God had given them adaptation for usefulness therein, were they, in humble dependance upon divine aid, to engage in them with all their hearts, fearless of remark. I know individuals who once thought they had no adaptation for such services, but being prevailed upon to engage in them, the blessing of God accompanied their efforts, and they are now most usefully employed in that department of labour.

H. After all you have said, I think it would be impossible ever to prevail with me to go forward as these people did last sabbath evening, as I am confident I could never obtain salvation in that way.

M. Perhaps not; for I by no means wish to insinuate that the plan alluded to is the most adapted to the case of every sinner seeking mercy, and the very best that can be employed to bring him to Jesus. Your objection to apply it to your own case, is not, however, any legitimate argument against it. It is possible that the want of humility may prevent you; for it must be admitted that it is very humiliating to a proud spirit to appear before God and a large congregation as a penitent sinner seeking mercy; and if you will carefully examine your heart, you will probably find that your opposition arises from pride rather than impartial judgment. I remember a lady who for some time was seeking the Lord, and who being requested one sabbath evening to present herself among the penitents, absolutely refused, and said she could not think of doing so; and on inquiry I clearly perceived that she did not consider that way of obtaining salvation sufficiently respectable;

when I ventured to tell her that, after having so expressed herself, it was my opinion that God would not save her until she took up her cross, and thus humbled herself before him. She still refused, and for many weeks struggled and prayed to obtain salvation; but being brought to a state bordering on desperation, she came forward one sabbath evening, and before a large congregation fell upon her knees among the penitents, and almost instantly did the Lord "give her beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Many other cases of a similar kind might be mentioned. Two persons of respectability and intelligence, members of the Wesleyan society in a town where a preacher accustomed to hold revival prayer meetings was for some time stationed, evinced great hostility to his proceedings, and intimated that the respectability of the circuit would be destroyed by his method of working. He took no notice of their animadversions, but regularly attended to his work, and they continued their opposition, endeavouring to amuse their friends by the most stale and ludicrous anecdotes relative to what they called "revivalists," with the view of bringing the prayer meetings in

question into disrepute. But before he left the circuit he had the pleasure not only to see them with broken and contrite hearts obtain salvation in one of those meetings, but to find them among his most ardent friends and successful coadjutors. They had been several years members of the society ; and not unfrequently have I seen persons who had been from one to twenty years in the Wesleyan connection obtain peace with God in such meetings.

H. Do you always on sabbath evenings hold prayer meetings after the regular services ?

M. I almost invariably do, except when I meet the society, give tickets to any of its classes, conduct a love-feast, or administer the sacrament of the Lord's supper ; and occasionally I hold them on week evenings after preaching.

H. Such meetings in a season of gracious visitation may be very proper ; but to hold them in the absence of such a visitation is, in my opinion, making an attempt to force a revival.

M. But I always expect a gracious visitation in connection with the ministry of the word, and act accordingly.

H. But are you not sometimes disappointed ?

M. I am ; but the cause of that disappoint-

ment is not with God, but is found in the sins and imperfections of man. For several years I have, on an average, held annually about forty such meetings as that which you witnessed last sabbath evening; and in all those meetings, with the exception of four, some persons have professed to obtain salvation. In one of the meetings where no apparent good was done, there was manifestly too much confidence placed in man, and God, therefore, withheld his blessing; and in another, the wildness of an untutored people, that could not be controlled, evidently grieved the Holy Spirit, and prevented good from being effected.

H. And would you have a continuous revival of religion?

M. I would.

H. But there is a sovereignty in the Spirit's bestowment of blessings opposed to that.

M. I think not; for whatever that sovereignty may be, it cannot be opposed to the Holy Scripture, which is said to be given by His inspiration; and as that Scripture assures the ambassadors of Christ that he will be with them "alway even to the end of the world," and that the word of God "shall not return unto him void," every man to whom a dispensation of the

gospel is committed may Scripturally expect the blessing of God to accompany his labours. There is always a divine influence attendant on the faithful ministry of the gospel, to meet the different conditions of those who hear it. If it were not so, Christian ministers could not with any propriety offer present salvation ; for no such offer could be accepted independently of divine influence ; and if many who attend the ministration of the word are not benefited thereby, it is because they in some way resist the Holy Ghost.

H. Whatever plausibility there may be in what you say, I think facts are against the opinion you express.

M. Pray how do you make that appear ?

H. By a reference to the history of the church. At different periods the church has had revivals, which have resembled the former and the latter rain, rather than a continual shower ; and this, if I mistake not, has been the general character of revivals in the Wesleyan connection, as well as in other sections of the Christian church. In some places a deep concern about spiritual things has been excited ; numerous meetings for penitents held ; the most ardent zeal in the Redeemer's cause evinced ; and many persons

have professed to find the salvation of God ; but in a few months the excitement has passed away, and the parties manifesting the most zeal during its continuance have returned to their former state of comparative indifference.

M. I admit your facts ; but still contend that the continual growth of believers in grace, the daily conversion of sinners, and consequently the progress and extension of pure religion, are in perfect accordance with the word of God. It is true that the Scriptures authorize us to look for copious effusions of the Holy Spirit, resembling the teeming showers which water the earth ; but it is equally true that they warrant us to expect, in connection with the ordinances of the church, a continuous influence, distilling as the gentle dew, and thus reviving God's heritage, and producing increasing beauty and fruitfulness therein.

H. If what you say be correct, may not all the means of grace, as well as revival prayer meetings, become effectual in the salvation of souls ?

M. Certainly they may ; and indeed they are efficient ; for many persons are saved, not only under the preaching of the word, but also in their closets, in class meetings, and in receiving

the holy sacrament ; and I am fully convinced that those means would be much more efficient, if persons engaging in them were as confidently to expect the divine blessing as when they engage in a prayer meeting. Some do ; and according to their faith it is done unto them : but others, I fear, never expect much good but in meetings like that to which you have so repeatedly alluded. This is certainly very wrong. Ministers should endeavour to convince their hearers of this error ; and all who take pleasure in the prosperity of Zion should expect to meet with God in all the assemblies of his saints. Prayer meetings are undoubtedly very important in the extension and revival of religion, and much calculated to be useful to a certain order of minds, and should, therefore, be encouraged and supported ; but they are, after all, but auxiliary to the preaching of the gospel, and must not supersede that divinely-appointed instrument of salvation, or they will lose their efficiency. As the dry bones in the valley came together while the prophet prophesied unto them, saying, " O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord ;" and as they " stood up an exceeding great army" while he prophesied unto the wind, saying, " Come from the four

winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live ;"—so the ministry of the word, signified by his address to the bones—and prayer for the Holy Ghost, signified by his address to the wind—are God's appointed means to quicken those who are dead in trespasses and in sins ; and if employed under the guidance of "the hand of the Lord," there will be a movement in the valley of death, and a noble army raised up for the Lord of hosts. Both means are important, and, therefore, neither of them should be neglected.

THE END.

School of Theology
at Claremont

THEOLOGY LIBRARY
CLAREMONT, CALIF.

AS 103



BV
285
Y6

Young, Robert, Wesleyan Metho
The importance of prayer me
moting the revival of religio
Lane & P.P. Sandford, 1841.
108p. 1⁴cm.

1. Prayer-meeting. I. Titl

178403

